

Sanitized Copy Approved for
Release 2010/09/10 :
CIA-RDP85T00875R001100130

Sanitized Copy Approved for
Release 2010/09/10 :
CIA-RDP85T00875R001100130

Secret

25X1



DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

Moscow and the Fedayeen

Secret

100
No. 2433/72
14 November 1972

Page Denied

SECRET

25X1

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
14 November 1972

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Moscow and the Fedayeen

Events since last summer have complicated Moscow's dealings with the fedayeen. While Soviet military forces and advisers were being expelled from Egypt in July, a delegation from the Palestine Liberation Organization, headed by Yasir Arafat, was in Moscow pressing for more and better arms. Then in rapid succession came the massacre at Munich carried out by the Black September Organization with Soviet weapons, the Israeli retaliation against fedayeen camps in Lebanon and Syria, and a major effort by Moscow to improve its position in other Arab countries--particularly Syria and Iraq--to compensate for its loss of influence in Egypt.

Through all this the Soviets evidently felt they had to demonstrate that they are valuable friends of the Arab cause. This has not been easy, since in doing so they involve themselves in a high-risk situation that is largely controlled by others. On the other hand, Soviet interests in the Middle East are so great that they do not wish to alienate the fedayeen, and they have increased their public support of the Palestinians.

The relationship between Moscow and the fedayeen is not a marriage of love--or even of convenience; it is a liaison of necessity.

Note: This memorandum was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence and coordinated within CIA.

SECRET

SECRET

25X1

Background of Soviet Involvement

Until the middle of 1968 the Soviets stayed clear of the fedayeen, providing them neither propaganda backing nor material support; in fact, they openly denounced guerrilla terrorism. By 1969, however, the Kremlin had clearly come to see the fedayeen as an independent political force, one that enjoyed so much sympathy among the Arab masses that it could not be ignored either by Arab governments or, therefore, by Moscow. At about this time, the Soviets decided to open their own lines of communication to the fedayeen. The Soviets wanted to keep in touch with this growing force and, if possible, gain some leverage over it. Moscow also wanted to ensure that the field would not be left open to the Chinese, who could then once again accuse the Kremlin of ignoring a viable national liberation movement.

The fedayeen were given Moscow's seal of approval as a legitimate national liberation movement. The Soviets began to provide the fedayeen light arms channeled through Arab governments, along with some modest propaganda support and a considerable amount of unsolicited advice. The various fedayeen organizations already had a quantity of Soviet arms obtained from sympathetic Arab governments; by the summer of 1969, the guns were reaching them with Moscow's blessing.

The decision to provide open support to the undisciplined and dangerous fedayeen could not have been easily reached, but Moscow probably concluded there was no other recourse if it were to maintain its credentials with the radical Arab world. Moscow has worked hard to keep the relationship sufficiently informal to avoid being blamed for the terrorists' worst excesses. Yasir Arafat, for instance, travels to Moscow at the invitation of the unofficial Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee, not of the Soviet Government. He has never received permission to establish an office of the Palestine Liberation Organization in Moscow.

-2-

SECRET

SECRET

25X1

The various fedayeen organizations have been decidedly unhappy with this level of support, and their frustration has added to the divisiveness in fedayeen ranks. Still, the knowledge that the USSR is their greatest present and potential source of arms, as well as a useful spokesman for "progressive" Arab causes, keeps the fedayeen pressing for more aid instead of writing off the relationship. They are in some degree dependent on the Soviets, but fedayeen leaders show no sign of subservience. They continue to pursue their own policies without seeking Moscow's blessing; indeed, they do so in the face of obvious Soviet disapproval.

The Nature of the Relationship

Disagreement and friction between the Soviets and fedayeen have persisted over the years. Moscow supports the fedayeen not because of common goals, but because of its heavy political and economic commitment in a region where the fedayeen enjoy considerable sympathy. In fact, the purposes of the two sides are sometimes at odds. The main aim of virtually all fedayeen organizations is the return of displaced Palestinians to their homeland--i.e., the destruction of Israel. Many are willing to use any means, no matter how risky, to reach this goal. The Soviets, on the other hand, thoroughly understand that any serious attempt to exterminate Israel could set them on a collision course with the US. Moscow has taken its lumps from the fedayeen and from its radical Arab clients for making clear that, while it fully supports Arab efforts to regain the land lost in 1967, it considers the existence of Israel to be a fact. The Soviets are simply not willing to accept the dangers of attempting to change this fact. Their caution also finds expression in their refusal to provide the offensive weapons that Egypt demands, a refusal that was a leading reason for Sadat's expulsion order.

Moscow is also troubled by the unpredictability and reckless tactics of the fedayeen. As a super-power with global interests, the USSR does not like to be identified with acts that provoke worldwide

-3-

SECRET

SECRET

25X1

condemnation. It has, nevertheless, not hesitated to exploit the confusion caused by Palestinian actions. For instance, although the Soviets ultimately got around to condemning the Munich massacre, they quickly sought advantage from the retaliatory Israeli strikes at fedayeen bases in Lebanon and Syria. Moscow made major propaganda capital out of the US veto of the Security Council resolution which called for a cessation of military operations in the Middle East but avoided mention of the Munich massacre. Moscow then conducted a much publicized military airlift to Syria. The Soviets sought to win points in Lebanon by offering arms assistance and demonstrative maneuvers of the Soviet Mediterranean squadron. With appropriate fanfare Moscow also furnished medical and emergency supplies to the fedayeen through the Lebanese Red Cross and Palestinian Red Crescent.

In many respects, the Munich massacre came at a convenient time for Moscow. The Soviets, on the defensive after their expulsion from Egypt, were concentrating on maintaining their remaining assets in the Middle East. The aggressive Israeli response served to remind the Arabs of their vulnerability, and gave Moscow the golden opportunity to underscore the Arabs' need for Soviet support.

The changed Soviet position in the area has not, however, been accompanied by any basic shift in Moscow's policy toward the fedayeen. The Soviets have become a bit more open in their propaganda support of the Palestinians, but they have not abandoned the prudence that has characterized their relations with them. The fedayeen are well aware that the Soviet gains resulting from their actions do not translate into increased Soviet aid for the fedayeen.

Military Assistance

The Soviets are the major source of arms for the fedayeen. Since 1969, Moscow--using Algeria, Egypt, Syria, and Iraq as intermediaries--has supplied rifles, machine guns, and Bazooka-type rockets. In addition, Moscow has provided military training for selected officers from virtually all of the significant fedayeen groups.

-4-

SECRET

SECRET

25X1

There are uncertainties about how the fedayeen requests for arms and training are made, how they are processed by Moscow, and how the equipment is actually delivered. Numerous organizations are involved on both sides, Soviet delivery policies and methods have varied in different situations, and the Soviets have often been evasive when confronted by unwelcome demands.

25X1

The favored recipient of Soviet arms has been the Palestine Liberation Army units attached to regular Egyptian, Syrian, and Iraqi military forces. Not only are these units conventionally organized with a need for conventional weapons, but the units are controlled by the Arab governments involved. Shipments of light arms have also been consigned to the Syrian-supported Saiqa organization and to Arafat's Fatah.

25X1

-5-

SECRET

SECRET

25X1

25X1

Moscow's continued unwillingness to give the fedayeen heavier weapons stems in part from a conviction that the stronger the Palestinians are, the more intractable they will be, and in part from a belief that a Palestinian army would pose a greater threat to host Arab governments than it would to Israel.

The Soviets and the Use of Terrorism

The Soviets are clearly uncomfortable with the Palestinian penchant for terrorism, particularly such atrocities as those at Lod Airport and at the Olympic Games in Munich.

25X1

In August a Pravda article analyzing the Palestinian movement claimed that such acts had greatly damaged the reputation of the entire Palestinian resistance, "making it difficult to obtain support from progressive and democratic forces." More recently, Foreign Minister Gromyko denounced at the UN the "criminal acts" that culminated in the events at Munich.

Moscow's disapproval of terrorism is not based on moral scruples, but on the belief that such tactics are generally unproductive and can lead to unforeseen and often uncontrollable consequences.

-6-

SECRET

SECRET

25X1

25X1

Moscow is not likely to divorce itself from the fedayeen movement just because of irresponsible acts of militant elements. It will instead try to maintain favor with the Palestinians and take advantage of the sympathy they enjoy among the Arab masses. The Soviets show this in their reluctance to denounce in public specific acts such as those at Lod and Munich. They have never officially condemned the Lod massacre, and it was only after several weeks that Gromyko raised a voice against the Munich affair. When approached by US officials to speak out against terrorism, Foreign Ministry officials have tended to excuse the fedayeen by citing past Israeli "atrocities" and US support for Israel. Still, Soviet refusal to give the Palestinians the weapons they need to conduct actions against Israel or to effect radical changes in the Arab countries to some extent pushes the fedayeen toward terrorism, if only out of frustration. The Soviets obviously believe, however, that to provide the heavier weapons the fedayeen want would invite even more difficult problems.

-7-

SECRET

SECRET

25X1

Attempts to Steer the Movement

For some time now and in a variety of ways, the Soviets have been trying to steer the Palestinians toward greater unity in the belief that they would then be easier to control--a point not lost on the Palestinians. The Soviets have also attempted to turn the fedayeen away from the reliance on military and terrorist activities in favor of political action.

The Soviets try to deal largely through Arafat and the Palestine Liberation Organization. To the extent possible, Soviet support, advice, and weapons are provided through this channel. At the same time, the Soviets recognize that, despite their advice, the fedayeen are badly fragmented and no one leader really controls or speaks for the movement. The Soviets, therefore, do have dealings with other fedayeen leaders, even with the more violence-prone such as George Habbash.

The Soviets openly stated that they would like a peaceful settlement in the Middle East, but that they were not pressing the fedayeen to stop all military activities against Israel. They warned, however, that another defeat like 1967 could spell the end of the "progressive" cause in the Middle East and stressed the need to concentrate on political organization and mass activities instead of military action. The Soviets urged the fedayeen to hold meetings with "progressive" Arab forces, to cooperate more with "progressive" Arab governments, and to organize a Palestinian political party.

Moscow reiterated its advice in the August Pravda article. The article attributed past fedayeen failures to disunity and the lack of political

SECRET

SECRET

25X1

organization. It called for the formation of a united front that would work both in the occupied territories and among refugees. The article criticized the fedayeen for operating without a political compass, and predicted that the movement could not develop without a mass base. This advice to get it all together, however, did not extend to support for a Palestinian government-in-exile, such as Egyptian President Sadat later advocated. Probably mindful of the difficulties associated with recognition, the Soviets oppose the concept.

In the final analysis, the Soviets are using the fedayeen to pursue their political goals in the Middle East in a manner not unlike others who have used the dispossessed Palestinians over the last 25 years. Moscow has given support and assistance because there was political capital to be made from fedayeen popularity in the area. This support and assistance have been provided in pursuit of Soviet, not Palestinian, goals. Given the unpredictability and passion of the Palestinian groups, Moscow would not hesitate to drop them should the fedayeen begin to lose their appeal. Until their popularity does fade, Soviet assistance, within careful bounds, will continue.

SECRET